

HOW TO...

SET UP an ongoing MAINTENANCE PLAN

Bushy Business, based in Surrey, designs and constructs domestic gardens. The company also offers maintenance and aftercare, and places great importance on making sure the gardens they create look good all year round. Managing director Chris Stone offers tips and advice for how to look after your investment

So, the hard landscaper has completed their work and the designer is scrupulously choosing the best face of the specimen tree that the soft landscape team are getting in the ground.

Finally, after months of hard work, decisions, the constant hum of machinery, praying for fine weather, and wondering how this will ever amount to anything, you are nearly there. The dream garden you've been so excited about is nearly completed.

That's it then, no more decisions, no more worries, you can just kick back and enjoy your new garden, right?

Maybe your designer has already run through the maintenance schedule with you, they may have left the planting plans and specific instructions for plant care as well. This is helpful because it means you can crack on and start looking after your garden, nurturing it, ensuring that the garden matures as per the vision that was sold to you.

CONSIDER USING A PROFESSIONAL FOR THEIR KNOWLEDGE, CORRECT TOOLS AND DEDICATED TIME

Fortunately, there are plenty of garden maintenance and aftercare firms to

choose from. Browse around first so you can find the right company for your garden's specific needs.

HOW MUCH SPARE TIME DO YOU HAVE TO SPEND IN THE GARDEN AND WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE OUT THERE?

Gardening should never be a chore. If you are only able to do the bits you enjoy then that's great; the heavy work, hedges, leaf collection and mowing could be carried out by a professional gardener. This leaves you to potter in the garden – a much more pleasurable experience.



Clockwise: Tidy outdoor dining area; garden well-maintained after completion; maintenance plan helps all garden styles look neat

KNOWLEDGE IS KING

A garden is an investment – it's much more than just a financial thing. After all that hard work and dedication, is it worth taking a risk? One of my clients referred to her use of secateurs as the 'eenie meenie miny moe' approach. I believe she used to just pick a stem and look away, wincing whilst she cut it. She hasn't touched her climbers for over 25 years now and is very happy to let us take the guess work out of it for her.

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

It won't just be you that is delighted with your new garden; there will be a queue of little critters that can't wait to munch, crunch, lay eggs on, in or around

your plants, or just plain decimate your garden. There are plenty of options to help deal with this. A reputable garden care company will be licensed to use the correct solution to keep pests at bay.

We also shouldn't overlook the fact that there are beneficial insects; careful management and encouragement of these is essential. Knowing the good, the bad and the ugly might be best left to professionals to get the right results.

WHAT TOOLS DO YOU OWN – ARE THEY SUITABLE FOR THE JOB AT HAND?

One of the absolute pleasures in my professional life is being able to buy and use the best tools for the job – it makes a job easier and more enjoyable. I guard my secateurs, shears, saws and snips like a dog with a bone. If you don't have all the mowers, hedge trimmers, blowers you might need, is it worth the investment and the running costs? Maybe treat yourself to the best hand tools and rely on your professional gardeners to provide the machinery.

THE GRASS IS GREENER

If you want the perfect lawn, then prepare yourself for plenty of work. If you have a new lawn, you have the perfect starting point, but it won't take long to get out of hand and lawn weeds hide in plain sight.

Cutting to the correct height, scarifying, aerating, feeding, irrigating – where to start? Many gardening companies will offer lawn care, and there are also dedicated lawn care firms. Better to get it right from the off rather than ending up with half a dozen part-used lawn feed bags in your garage.

There are so many facets to caring for your garden, but it is one of the most rewarding ways to spend your time. If it isn't for you, then make sure you engage a professional gardener who knows their stuff, such as one vetted by the Association of Professional Landscapers.

Every garden is unique – just as every client has their own requirements, so do their gardens. Choose a gardener who understands your vision – take time to convey it and ensure they show passion. After all, this is your dream garden and they should appreciate that. **DG**

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